

Convergence of Open and Distance Learning and Conventional Education Systems : Need of the Country

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Introduction

The Convergence Scheme of IGNOU, converges the Open and Distance Learning systems (ODL) and Conventional Educational Systems. In the western world similar system is termed as Blended Learning system. The objective of the Scheme is to achieve the targets set out in the Eleventh Plan Document for Higher Education, and focusing on access and equity issues. Inclusion as a concept goes beyond just providing distance learning access. It takes into account the need to interface with the conventional system, use innovative technologies and to optimize the access to physical facilities, intellectual and knowledge resources in institution to achieve its goals. There has been an enormous growth in the higher education sector in the country. This growth is due to the fact that on one hand many new Universities and colleges have been established and on the other hand technology mediated Open & Distance Learning has come up in a big way. The conventional education system and the Open Education systems have its own unique qualities and disadvantages. It is felt that a perfect blending of both the systems could bring down significantly the limitations of both the systems whereby the society can benefit more out of this Convergence Scheme. The blended learning system is consistent with the values of traditional higher education institutions and has the proven potential to enhance both the effectiveness and efficiency of meaningful learning experiences (Randy & Heather, 2004). Research suggests that the reasons for the learners adopting such blended learning system is primarily because of the following advantages (Graham and Dziuban, 2005)

- (1) improved learning effectiveness
- (2) increased access and convenience and
- (3) greater cost effectiveness

Under this scheme the idling time of the physical and human resources of the conventional education system like classroom, laboratories, libraries, teachers etc is being more effectively and optimally utilized through a combination of face to face and distance education approaches for the delivery of various IGNOU programmes. The main target group under the Convergence Scheme of IGNOU is the students between the age group of 17 and 30 who could attend regular classes. The analysis of enrolment figures clearly shows that there are a significant percentage of students between the age group of 17 and 25 in the Open Learning system of the country. The students under this age group are mostly unemployed and seek higher education for better employment. The limitation of admissions in the conventional higher education institutes pushes such learners to the Open Education system. The Open Education system is learner centric where as the conventional education system is teacher centric in nature. In the Indian context it is believed that the young learners should be imparted with Indian traditional values and principles along with the curriculum. Unlike the employed students, the unemployed students in the Open education system especially between the age group of 17 and 25 needs personal attention as there is some pressure on them for their successful quick completion of the programme so as to seek employment of their choice. The Convergence Scheme provides such kind of personal attention to the students of Open learning system which is otherwise not available. This scheme also allows the students of the conventional college to pursue another value added programme

simultaneously whereby the employment opportunity increases once they successfully complete their higher education.

Some of the features of the Convergence Scheme are as follows

- Value addition to their existing curriculum;
- Some kind of job orientation and employable skills;
- Competency skill development through vocational/ professional education;
- Exposure to use of latest technology for education;
- An opportunity to seamless access to quality education;
- Familiarity with flexible and blended learning methods.

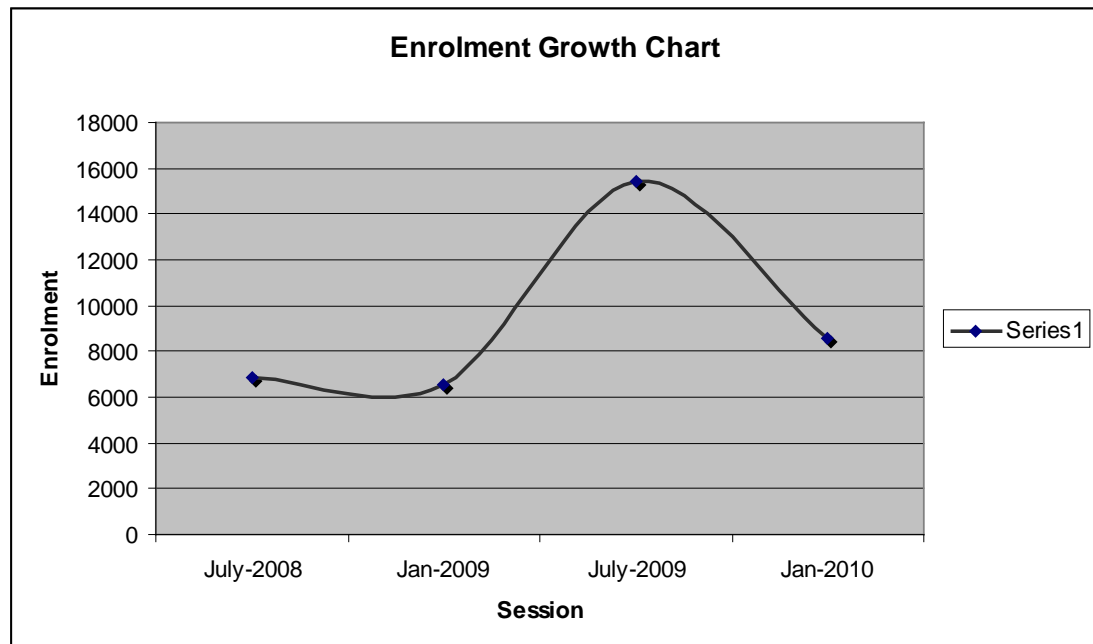
Many of the existing IGNOU courses have found new takers with the announcement of the Scheme. Given a target of achieving 15% gross enrolment in higher education by 2015, the scheme aims to move it from the current enrolment of 11% in the 16-23 age groups. Under the Convergence Scheme, 29 Certificate Programmes, 27 Post Graduate Diploma level programmes, 15 Diploma programmes, 15 Bachelor programmes and 19 Post Graduate level programmes are being offered through 418 Partner Institutions across the country. There are around 75000 students enrolled under the scheme as on 31st September 2010. Whereas, the enrolments made till January 2010 session is considered for the study and it amounts to around 45000 students. The Partner Institutions in the rural areas have benefited a large number of rural students especially women students who are otherwise deprived of higher education/vocational education. To mention few, the Computer Literacy Program of IGNOU which is a non-credit programme has influenced in imparting the Computer skills to the common men and women through the Partner Institutions in the North-Eastern region and Eastern region of rural area.

Enrolment Scenario

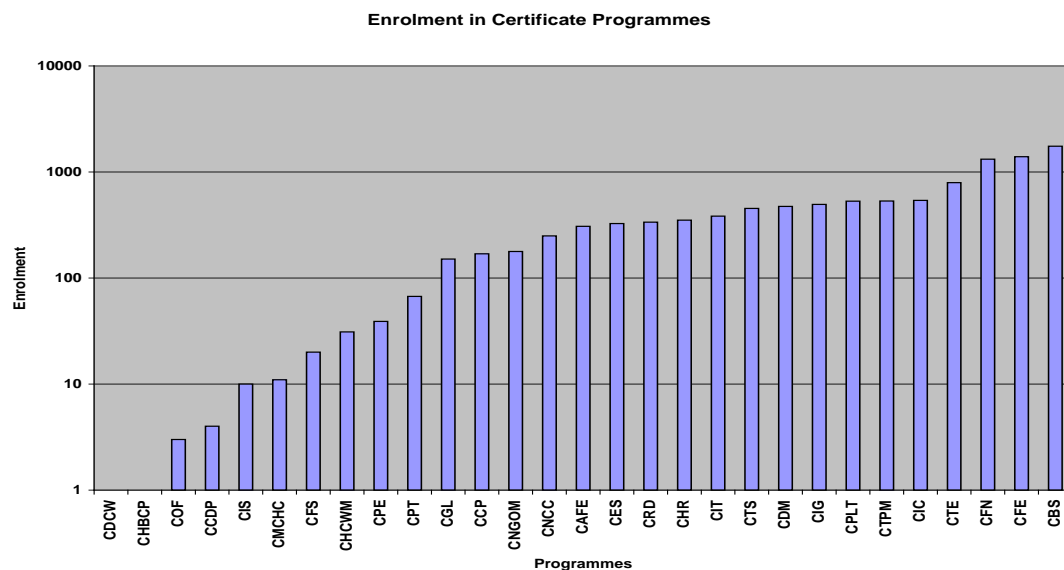
The enrolment in July session is always more when compared with the enrolment in the January session. The students who could not get accommodated in the conventional educational system seek admission in the ODL system in the same session to avoid any loss of time and this is precisely the reason for the increase in enrolment in July session. Now, with this scheme large number of students gets an opportunity to pursue their programme from a reputed college. The students under the scheme are being taught by the same faculty of the institution/college and have access to all facilities similar to their counterpart in the conventional educational system. The only difference is that the students registered under the convergence scheme get their degree awarded by IGNOU and the other students get their degree from the university to which the institution is affiliated with.

While IGNOU has over 2000 Learner Support Centres by different names depending on the specific role they play such as Regular Study Centres, Programme Study Centres, Special Study Centres, Recognised Study Centres etc., the Scheme on Convergence has helped in developing synergies with well endowed colleges. This has resulted in qualified faculty and state of art infrastructure being made available to students, in addition to providing additional mentoring on a flexi time basis.

The session wise enrolment growth under the convergence Scheme is graphically represented below



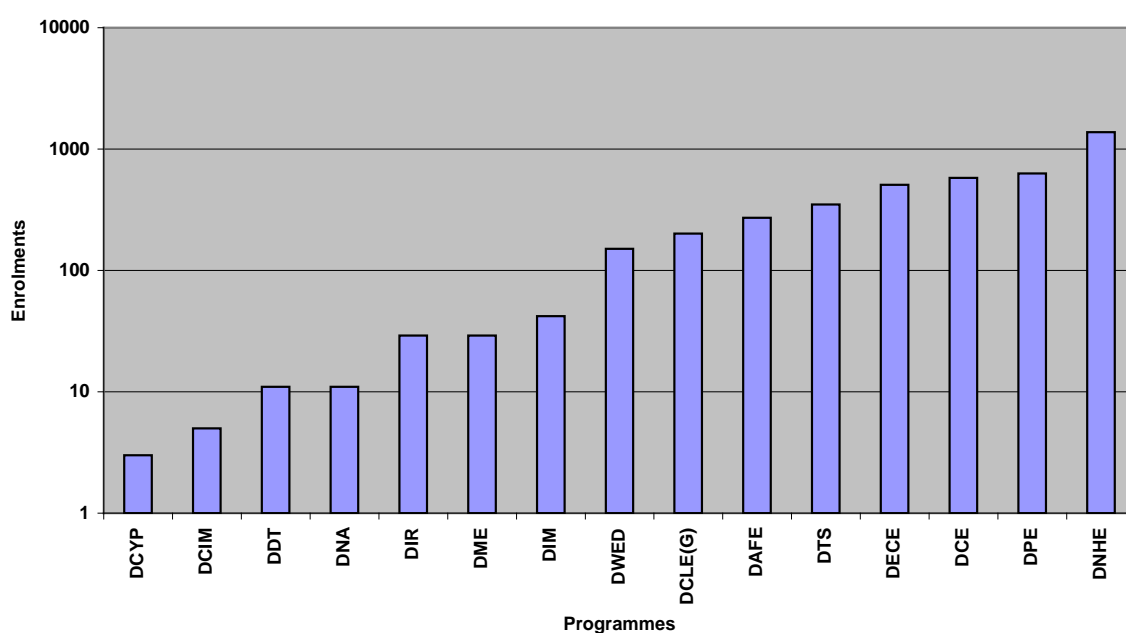
There are 10921 students enrolled with the Certificate level programmes. Certificate Programme in Lab Technician (CPLT), Certificate in Teaching English (CTE), Certificate in Functional English (CFE), Certificate in Food and Nutrition (CFN), Certificate in Business Skills (CBS) are some of the programmes that has attracted large enrolments. Some of the Certificate programmes have become more popular with the Convergence Scheme. The high enrolment in the said programmes clearly indicates that the regular students of the Partner Institutions intend to pursue these value added programmes.



There are 4203 students enrolled in various Diploma level programmes. The significance to mention here is the offering of the Diploma in Primary Education (DPE) through the Convergence Scheme. There are 631 students enrolled in this programme. This programme

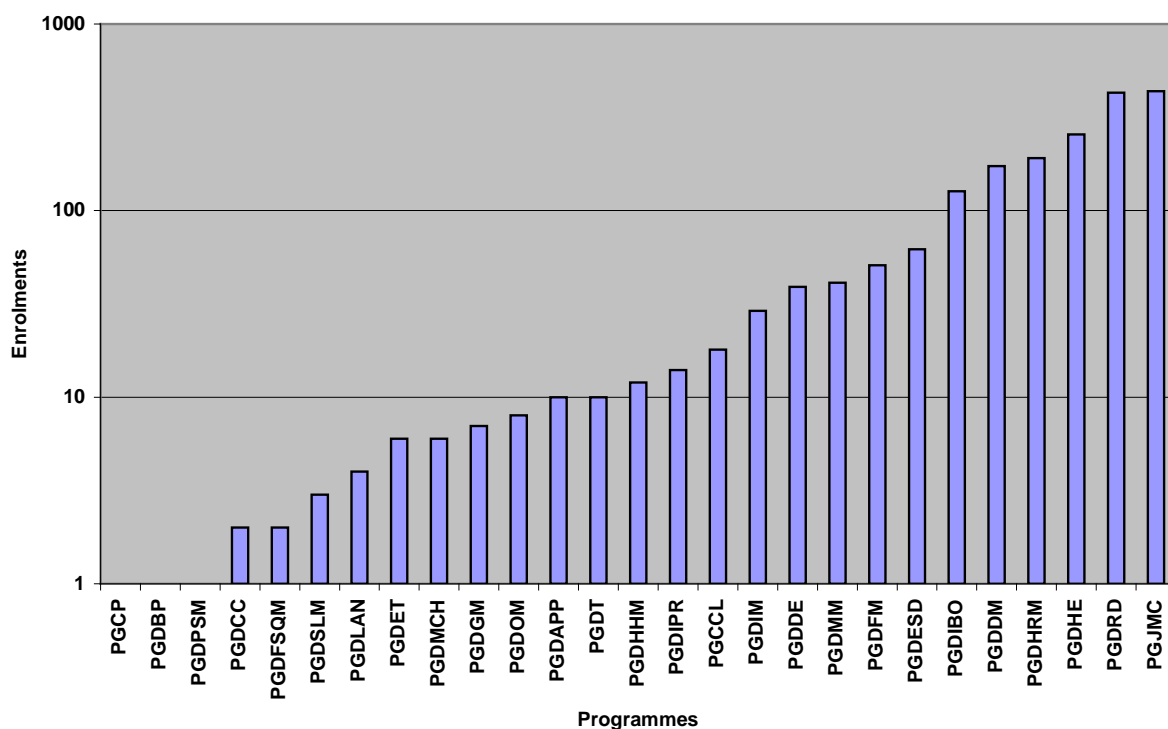
was primarily developed for the government teachers in the North-Eastern region of India duly approved by the National Council for Teacher Education. The admission in this programme was restricted to only the government teachers of the North-Eastern states. All states of the country have more private school teachers than teachers of government schools. The private school teachers are deprived of pursuing Diploma in Primary Education programme. Offering of DPE through Convergence Scheme gave opportunities for the private school teachers also in the North-Eastern states to pursue the programme. Under this scheme the DPE programme is now being offered to benefit the government teachers as well as the private school teachers across the country. Whereby issues related to equity, access and democratisation are addressed to a great extent through the scheme.

Enrolment in Diploma Programmes



The enrolments in various Post Graduate programmes are shown graphically below. The graph clearly shows that Post Graduate Diploma in Rural Development and Post Graduate Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication are the most sorted professional level PD Diploma programmes. Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE) and Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE) is designed and offered for the teachers in the higher education institutions. These programmes are becoming popular through the Convergence Scheme.

Enrolment in PG Diploma Programmes



Findings & Conclusion

The findings indicate the success of the Convergence Scheme.

The success of the Scheme can be gauged by several indicators which are as follows:

- Till date, 418 institutions have partnered under the Convergence Scheme. In addition, about 30 applications are in pipeline to join the Scheme.
- With already over 75,000 students enrolled cumulatively, the Scheme hopes to play a pivotal role in achieving the National 11th Plan Target of 15% gross enrolment in Higher Education by 2015.
- The Scheme target the age group 17-25 while other IGNOU courses on offer does not have any upper age limit.
- More women are getting enrolled in this Scheme.
- The Scheme has focused on identifying partners in low-literacy district and in remote areas including North East India.
- Several diploma and certificate programmes of IGNOU which otherwise were low enrolment programmes have been opted by students registered under this Scheme, thus making them more popular.
- The pass percentage of the students enrolled in this scheme is much better.
- The best colleges with excellent infrastructure have been attracted to the Scheme and through this partnership they function as another form of Special Study Centres.
- The 6 months intensive course called Bachelor's Preparatory Programme (BPP) is a boon to those who were unable to complete Pre-University or Senior Secondary education, and helps them to fulfil their aspiration to obtain Bachelor's degree and thus enrolled into Higher Education.

- Over 30 new programmes are on offer under the Scheme.

In short, technology in Education, when applied creatively enhances the potential to address both access and inclusion issues, Convergence Scheme is one of the innovative initiatives of IGNOU in this direction which is the need of the hour to sustain the growth being witnessed in all sectors of India.

Reference

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